



May 26, 2020

TO: Secretary Karen Ross and the Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel

Re: **Request for the EFA SAP to Convene a SWEEP Stakeholder Advisory Group**

Dear Secretary Ross and the Science Advisory Panel Members:

Thank you for the important role you have played in guiding the development of the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP) over the past six years. Your expert input to the program has contributed greatly to its success. Many farmers in our respective networks have benefitted from the program and are eager to see the program continue and expanded.

In light of new regulatory, technological, and policy developments, as well as stakeholder feedback, we, the undersigned, are requesting the Science Advisory Panel (SAP) convene a stakeholder advisory group to review and, if necessary, make recommendations for updates to the program. We are making this request now to give stakeholders and the SAP adequate time outside of SWEEP's typical quick-turnaround funding cycles to consider these developments and address the next phase of the program.

Farmers are facing a complex new regulatory environment, from implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) to new requirements from the Bay-Delta Plan and the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS) Plan. These changes have made resource management more challenging and complicated, and require the need for both efficient and flexible on-farm water management systems. Concurrently, irrigation technologies are evolving rapidly, creating both exciting new opportunities and the need for more resources for some growers.¹

For the first few years, SWEEP predominately received funding from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), which required every project to demonstrate quantifiable on-farm greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions. This requirement led to the incentivization of micro and drip irrigation systems, and also had the consequence of complicating the implementation of on-farm water efficiency projects that use surface water, portable irrigation pumps, and pressurized water. The current funding source for the program (Proposition 68) and potential future funding sources for the program (e.g. potential bond funds or the General Fund) may not have the same GHG

¹ Management of Agricultural Energy and Water Use with Access to Improved Data. Fresno State Center for Irrigation Technology and Ag H2O. 2017.

requirements as GGRF. As such, this may allow for a greater diversity of projects to help farmers address on-farm water management challenges.

In light of these changes and new opportunities for SWEEP, we are requesting the SAP use its authority under Section 568(c) of the Food and Agriculture Code² to convene stakeholders to make recommendations to address the following:

1. The program's ability to help farmers improve water use efficiency – what's working well and what might the program seek to improve? How might the program evolve to help farmers address new resource management challenges?
2. How might the program improve participation by operations that have historically faced barriers in accessing or utilizing the program?
3. How might promotion and coordination of SWEEP be improved with irrigation districts, groundwater sustainability agencies, and USDA-NRCS?

The state's record-breaking drought that spurred the creation of SWEEP in 2014 has thankfully subsided, but as temperatures continue to rise, the risk of severe droughts is predicted to increase in California by 50 percent by 2100.³ Climate scientists also predict the state will increasingly experience precipitation whiplash, going from severe droughts to greater flooding.⁴ We have a wealth of expertise in the state that can be tapped to participate in discussions on SWEEP, including farmers, technical assistance providers, irrigation experts, and irrigation industry representatives familiar with the grant program. We believe a diverse stakeholder advisory group can provide valuable expertise and time to assist the SAP in updating SWEEP to better serve our state's farmers in these challenging times, and we believe the best time to convene such a group is now.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,



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Associate Policy Director
CalCAN



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Policy Advocate
California Farm Bureau Federation

² FAC 568(c) states: "The panel may establish ad hoc committees, which may include professionals, scientists, or representatives of nongovernmental entities, to assist it in performing its functions."

³ Pathak, T., et. al. 2018. Climate change trends and impacts on California agriculture: A detailed review. *Agronomy*, (3)25.

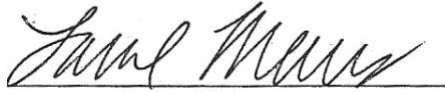
⁴ Defined as "two consecutive years when wet season precipitation falls under the 20th percentile the first year and above the 80th percentile the second year." Source: Swain, D., Langenbrunner, B., Neelin, J., and Hall, A. 2018. Increasing precipitation volatility in twenty-first century California. *Nature Climate Change*, 427-433.



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